

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the County Council held in Canalside, Marsh Lane, Bridgwater
TA6 6LQ the Wednesday 23 November 2022 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr S Ashton, Cllr S Aujla, Cllr J Bailey, Cllr J Baker, Cllr M Barr, Cllr M Best, Cllr B Bolt, Cllr A Bradford, Cllr H Bruce, Cllr T Butt-Philip, Cllr S Carswell, Cllr M Caswell, Cllr N Cavill, Cllr N Clark, Cllr B Clarke, Cllr P Clayton, Cllr S Coles, Cllr J Cook-Woodman, Cllr N Cottle, Cllr A Dance, Cllr D Darch, Cllr H Davies, Cllr T Deakin, Cllr D Denton, Cllr M Dimery, Cllr A Dingwall, Cllr L Duddridge, Cllr S Dyke, Cllr C Ellis, Cllr H Farbahi, Cllr B Ferguson, Cllr B Filmer, Cllr D Fothergill, Cllr A Govier, Cllr T Grimes, Cllr A Hadley, Cllr B Height, Cllr A Hendry, Cllr M Hewitson, Cllr E Hobbs, Cllr H Hobhouse, Cllr J Hunt, Cllr D Johnson, Cllr H Kay, Cllr A Kendall, Cllr J Kenton, Cllr T Kerley, Cllr M Kravis, Cllr M Lewis, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr T Lock, Cllr M Lovell, Cllr D Mansell, Cllr H Munt, Cllr T Munt, Cllr M Murphy, Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr O Patrick, Cllr C Payne, Cllr E Pearlstone, Cllr E Potts-Jones, Cllr T Power, Cllr H Prior-Sankey, Cllr S Pugsley, Cllr W Read, Cllr L Redman, Cllr M Rigby, Cllr T Robbins, Cllr D Rodrigues, Cllr J Roundell Greene, Cllr D Ruddle, Cllr P Seib, Cllr H Shearer, Cllr B Smedley, Cllr F Smith, Cllr J Snell, A Soughton, Cllr M Stanton, Cllr A Sully, Cllr C Sully, Cllr S Wakefield, Cllr M Wale, Cllr R Wilkins, Cllr A Wiltshire, Cllr D Woan and Cllr R Woods, Cllr G Wren, Cllr R Wyke

37. **Apologies for Absence** - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Cllr L Baker, Cllr A Boyden, Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr S Collins, Cllr M Dunk, Cllr Pauline Ham, Cllr Phillip Ham, Cllr M Healey, Cllr R Henley, Cllr V Keitch, Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr M Martin, Cllr G Oakes, Cllr S Osborne, Cllr K Pearce, Cllr D Perry, Cllr F Purbrick, Cllr B Revans, Cllr G Slocombe, Cllr F Smith-Roberts, Cllr L Trimnell

Virtual Microsoft Teams attendance: Cllr M Dunk, Cllr B Revans, Cllr S Osbourne, Cllr L Trimnell

38 **Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 2

The Chair reminded the meeting that details of all Members' interests in District, Town and Parish Councils could be viewed on the Council's Website and there was no need for members to individually declare these personal interests in those other councils at the meeting.

Cllr Jason Baker and Cllr Evie Potts-Jones declared a personal interest in Item 8, Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board.

39 **Minutes from the meeting held on Wednesday 20 July 2022 and the Extraordinary meeting held 5 October 2022** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 20 July 2022 and the Extraordinary meeting held 5 October 2022 were accepted as a true and accurate record and were signed by the Chair.

40 **Chairs Announcements** – Agenda Item 4

The Chair of Council referred to the events detailed in the Chair's Information Sheet No. 2, circulated and published with the agenda.

In Memorium

The Chair paid tribute to the former County Councillors Anthony Trollope Bellew, Valerie Byrne and former Chair's Consort, Stuart Lawrence.

Anthony Trollope Bellew - Anthony was County Councillor from 2001-13 for Watchet and the Quantocks. During his time as a Councillor, Anthony was the Cabinet Member for Environment and sat on numerous committees including the Cabinet, the Somerset Waste Board and the Regulation Committee.

Valerie Byrne - Valerie was a County Councillor from 1989 – 1997 and represented Wellington.

Former Chair's Consort Stuart Lawrence, husband of County Councillor Christine Lawrence – Stuart was the most supportive of husbands, was an accomplished artist and was an avid walker.

At the invitation of the Chair of the Council, Cllr John Bailey, Cllr D Fothergill, Cllr A Govier, Cllr S Dyke, Cllr M Rigby, Cllr G Wren paid tribute to former County Councillor Anthony Trollope Bellew, Cllr A Govier paid tribute to Valerie Byrne and Cllr D Fothergill paid tribute to Stuart Lawrence.

Members of Council stood and observed a minute silence.

The Council received and noted the report.

41 **Public Question Time** – Agenda Item 5

Public questions were received from

1. Nigel Behan regarding autumn Statement / Local Authority budgets

2. John Brendon regarding land at Queen Camel Playing Field (petition)
3. Alyson Rodgers regarding trail hunting on Council land
4. Pip Donovan regarding hunts and road closures
5. Tim Andrewes regarding Department for Transport Bus Recovery Grant
6. Kevin Comer regarding National Highways A358 consultation
7. Robert Barnes regarding flower beds and blocked drains at Duke Street, Taunton
8. David Redgewell regarding Taunton Bus Station / Castle Cary Station
9. Emma King regarding the closure of the St Andrew's Ward
10. Eva Bryczkowski regarding the closure of the St Andrew's Ward
11. Bev Anderson regarding the closure of the St Andrew's Ward
12. Michael Strange regarding the Somerset Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

In the absence of Mr Andrewes and Mr Barnes, their questions were read out by the Council's Monitoring Officer, Scott Wooldridge. The questions and responses are attached to these minutes in Appendix A.

42 **Report of the Leader and Executive - Items for Decision** - Agenda Item 6

This item was introduced by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, which set out the Leader's and Executive's recommendations to Council arising from their consideration of reports at the Executive meetings on 21 September 2022, 19 October 2022 and 16 November 2022. The Council had before it the following reports:

Paper A - Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2022/23

The Lead Member for Finance and Humans Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon presented the report, highlighting that; the report summarised the account of Treasury Management activity and outturn for the first half of the year and ensures Somerset County Council (SCC) is embracing Best Practice in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) recommendations; all treasury activity was conducted within the benchmarks set as Prudential limits for prudent and sustainable capital plans, financing, and investment; and that a risk-averse approach has been taken in relation to investment activity with priority being given to security and liquidity over yield.

The County Council discussed the proposals, and the following points were raised; clarity of acronyms used in the report; and investment into pooled funds, including the CCLA.

Having been proposed by Cllr Liz Leyshon and seconded Cllr David Fothergill, the Council RESOLVED to:

Endorse the Treasury Management mid-year report for 2022-23.

Paper B - Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Lead Member for Finance and Humans Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon presented the report, highlighting: that the creation of the new Council requires the alignment of various areas within council tax and business rates policies from 1 April 2023; that the report outlines the proposed new council tax reduction scheme for the new Somerset Council; that the proposed scheme has been finalised following a full public consultation exercise; the work to minimise the impact on individual customers, businesses and organisations; the hardship mechanisms that enable support where necessary; and the communication of information and advice to inform people how help can be found within the new scheme.

The Assistant Director – Customers, Somerset West and Taunton Council, Richard Sealey summarised the proposed scheme, highlighted the requirement to provide a local scheme and further noted: that the scheme relates to people of working age; that the central government dictates the scheme for pension-age people; the public consultation response; the proposal to move to a grid income banded scheme; the proposal for up to 100% in Council tax reduction to those claimants on the lowest incomes; the hardship scheme which allows discretionary payments to individuals who are experiencing significant hardship; and the affordability of the scheme.

Having been proposed by Cllr Liz Leyshon and seconded Cllr David Fothergill, the Council RESOLVED to:

Agree the Council Tax Reduction Scheme as detailed in Paper B and its appendices

Cllr Jason Baker and Cllr Evie Potts-Jones declared personal interests in respect of Paper C and left the room.

Paper C - Council Tax Discounts and Premiums

The Lead Member for Finance and Humans Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon presented the report, highlighting: that as a billing authority, there is discretion to set or remove discounts in relation to second homes, empty properties and properties undergoing or requiring structural alterations; the powers to charge additional premiums in relation to long term empty properties and the change expected through the Levelling up Bill; the additional general powers to create local discounts or exemptions; and care

leaver discounts and the new discount for foster carers or qualifying special guardians.

The Assistant Director – Customers, Somerset West and Taunton Council, Richard Sealey summarised the proposed approach and noted the high degree of alignment between the existing Council’s schemes.

The County Council discussed the proposals, and the following points were raised: the increase in second home ownership; the second home premium implications for second homes occupied family members and the key criteria of occupation; the need to reduce unoccupied second homes and ensure sufficient supply of properties for communities; the specific issues in the Exmoor area; affordable housing; the impact of phosphates issues; Ministry of Defence property contributions; and the enforcement of Council Tax restrictions on caravans.

The Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon undertook to provide written responses to Cllr Hugh Davies regarding the enforcement of restrictions on occupancy of caravans in relation to the Council Tax discounts and to Cllr Stephen Pugsley regarding the hypothecation of the additional revenue generated.

Having been proposed by Cllr Liz Leyshon and seconded by Cllr David Fothergill, the Council RESOLVED to:

Agree the Council Tax Discounts and Premiums as detailed in Paper C and its appendices.

Cllr Jason Baker and Cllr Evie Potts-Jones re-joined the meeting.

PAPER D Proposed Non-Domestic Rating Discretionary Areas and Hardship

The Lead Member for Finance and Humans Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon presented the report, highlighting: the decisions required in respect of areas where the Council has local discretion under the non-domestic rating provisions, specifically discretionary rate relief and hardship provisions; the complexities and difficulties in alignment due to legislation; and the importance of communications for residents and businesses.

The Assistant Director – Customers, Somerset West and Taunton Council, Richard Sealey summarised the current spend across the four District Councils, highlighting that the proposed scheme is broadly cost neutral.

The County Council discussed the proposals, and the following points were raised: the opportunity to provide rate relief to businesses which were operating within the environmental and green environment; a suggestion of

an all member briefing to aid understanding; and a request for clarification of the impact of the new non-discretionary relief scheme in respect of any commercial properties owned by the Taunton Heritage Trust.

The Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon undertook to provide a written response to Cllr David Fothergill regarding impacts on the non-discretionary scheme in respect of commercial properties owned by the Taunton Heritage Trust.

Having been proposed by Cllr Liz Leyshon and seconded by Cllr David Fothergill, the Council RESOLVED to:

Agree the proposed Non-Domestic Rating Discretionary Areas and Hardship proposals as detailed in Paper D and its appendices

43 **Report of the Monitoring Officer** – Agenda Item 7

The Council's Monitoring Officer, Scott Wooldridge, presented the report, highlighting: that the Localism Act 2011 requires Councils to have arrangements in place to investigate and make decisions on allegations that a Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct; that the arrangements to make decisions on allegations must include provision for the appointment of one or more "Independent Person" through a transparent process; that as part of the transition to the new Somerset Council, work has been undertaken to review the proposals for Independent Persons to support the new Council's standards arrangements, and that it is recommended that the new Somerset Council appoints three Independent Persons ahead of 1 April 2023.

Having been proposed by Cllr John Bailey and seconded by Cllr Theo Butt-Philips, the Council RESOLVED to:

- 1. Appoint Lorraine Davey as a Reserve Independent Person under Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 with immediate effect until 31 March 2023**
- 2. Authorise the Monitoring Officer to undertake the recruitment of three Independent Persons for the new Somerset Council on the basis set out in this report**

44 **Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board** – Agenda Item 8

The Chair, Corporate Parenting Report, Jane Lock, presented the report, which provided a summary progress report of work and outcomes of meetings from the start of this Municipal year to November 2022. Jane Lock further noted: that the Council's corporate parenting arrangements were reviewed following the

May 2022 Local Elections to ensure Somerset continues to provide a robust Corporate Parenting approach; and the many positive outcomes from the work of the Board and sub-groups.

Cllr Frances Nicholson proposed, and Cllr Tessa Munt seconded an amendment to formally thank the former Independent Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, Jill Johnson, which was agreed and added to the recommendations.

Having been proposed by Cllr Tessa Munt and seconded by Cllr Leigh Redman, the Council RESOLVED to:

- **Recommend a focus on corporate parenting responsibility as we move to a unitary council.**
- **Support and promote a whole council approach to create practical and specific offers to Care Leavers through our Local Offer and the Care Leaver Covenant.**
- **Extend its thanks to the Somerset Care Council's young people for all the hard work that they undertake.**
- **Formally thank the former Independent Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, Jill Johnson.**

45 **Report of the HR Policy Committee** – Agenda Item 9

The Council received and noted the report of the HR Policy Committee, which provided a summary of the meeting of the Committee on 17 November 2022 which considered three items of business: the Chief Officer Pay Award 2022-23, an update on the LGR People Workstream, and employment policies.

Having been proposed by Cllr Liz Leyshon and seconded by Cllr Leigh Redman, the Council RESOLVED to:

- **Approve the 2022/23 pay award for Somerset County Council Chief Officers, at Somerset Grades 2-3, of £1,925 to reflect the increase agreed nationally for Green Book staff and Chief Officers.**
- **Agree that no pay increase is awarded to the recently appointed Chief Executive.**
- **Note the nationally agreed Green Book pay award for 2022/23 and the updated Somerset salary rates for grades 17 to 4 for the financial year 2022/23**

46 **Report of the Leader and Executive - Items for Information** - Agenda Item 10

The Council received a report by the Leader and Executive summarising the key decisions taken by the Leader, Executive Lead Members and Officers between 9 July 2022 and 11 November 2022, together with the items of business discussed at the Executive meetings on 17 August 2022, 21 September 2022 and 19 October 2022 and the work of the Cost of Living Working Group between September and November 2022.

The Chair, Cost of Living Working Group, Cllr Councillor Bill Revans and Executive Lead Members responded to questions from members.

Cllr Diogo Rodriguez asked questions on bus patronage in Somerset and reduced bus fares post March 2023. The Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Mike Rigby undertook to provide a written response.

The Council received and noted the report.

47 **Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee** - Agenda Item 11

The Council received and noted a report from the Chair of the Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee, Cllr Rosemary Woods which provided a summary progress report and outcomes of the work of meetings held from the start of the Municipal year to November 2022, with points raised regarding the input of items for the work programme and the ongoing scrutiny of items on the Adults and Health Committee.

The Council received and noted the report.

48 **Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee** – Agenda Item 12

The Council received and noted a report from the Chair of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee, Cllr Leigh Redman which provided a summary progress report and outcomes of the work of meetings held from the start of this Municipal Year to November 2022.

The Council received and noted the report.

49 **Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies Environment Committee** – Agenda Item 13

The Council received and noted a report from the Chair of the Scrutiny for Policies Environment Committee, Cllr Martin Dimery which provided a summary progress report and outcomes of the work of meetings held from the start of this Municipal Year to November 2022.

The Council received and noted the report.

50 **Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee** -Agenda Item 14

The Council received and noted a report from the Chair of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee, Cllr Gwil Wren which provided a summary progress report and outcomes of the work of meetings held from 12 July to 11 October 2022.

The Council received and noted the report.

51 **Annual Report of the Somerset Armed Forces Covenant Partnership (SAFC)** – Agenda Item 15

The Chair, Somerset Armed Forces Covenant (SAFC), Partnership, Cllr Henry Hobhouse, presented a report by the SAFC Partnership, which provided a summary progress report and update on the work and outcomes since the last Annual Report to Full Council in November 2021.

Cllr Hobhouse extended an invitation to Cllr David Fothergill to meet to discuss improvements to the Armed Forces Covenant.

Cllr Ros Wyke summarised the options of support available to homeless veterans within the Mendip area.

The Council received and noted the report.

52 **Any other urgent items of business** – Agenda Item 16

There were no urgent items of business

(The meeting ended at 1.10pm)

CHAIR

